

Kia ora Sir Harry Kroto

In February 2007 I attended a seminar you gave in Wellington, New Zealand, while I was completing my undergraduate degree in biomedical science. You spoke about your work on the buckyball, the marvels of science, and (most importantly for me) what it means to be a scientist in this day and age. I found your seminar both motivating and inspirational for a young scientist like myself.

However, during the year of 2007 I had started going through a sort of "transitional" phase and I was finding it uncomfortable listening to some parts of your seminar when I was in the audience. Having been raised as a Roman Catholic, it was difficult for me to accept both the rationality that is science, and the defeatist ignorance of religiosity. I felt, in a word (which I have borrowed from you), schizophrenic.

Towards the end of your seminar, during question time, I asked about the clash of religion and science (which I was having more and more trouble rationalising in my own head). I asked whether I could still believe in this God I had been taught to believe in despite my growing understanding of the world around me. We also talked about why atheists (e.g. Dr. Richard Dawkins) seem so aggressive toward those with religion.

Even if I did my best to not sound rude, I still would have sounded quite ignorant. Looking back on it now, I feel a little embarrassed I even said those things to you and in front of so many of my fellow scientists! Yet I am glad I stood up and asked those things about religion and science because I left the seminar happier to know that you had seen this schizophrenia before, and that I did not have to be afraid of this "crisis of faith" I was experiencing. In response to my question about Dr. Dawkins and his campaign against religion, you said "Because nobody else will!"

Soon after, a friend of mine who also attended your seminar sent me an article you wanted forwarded to me called "Scientists as Citizens" by Sir John Cornforth. I had never felt more proud to be a scientist than when I read that article.

Once I affirmed my atheism, I started exploring more on what was out there regarding atheism. I read "The God Delusion", read opinion pieces, talked to atheist friends, and read up on life stances such as humanism.

Nowadays, my life is more fulfilling, more enjoyable, and above all more precious than it ever was. I have the rest of my life ahead of me to learn about the world through opened eyes, to care about the people around me and the welfare of this pale blue dot, and to live this life that is truly my own.

I guess I am emailing you to say thanks, because you are one of the many people in my life who have gently challenged me to see the world differently. The work that many scientists like you do to spread enlightenment and knowledge is incredibly valuable, especially in this day and age.

I look forward to facing the challenges that come with being both an atheist and a scientist; I know I do not face them alone.

JJ New Zealand